

The Fairytale and Plot Structure

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Beauty and the Beast: The Irresolute Nineteenth Plot Function

In Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont's *Beauty and the Beast*, the pivotal 19th function is not really pivotal, since the outcome of the fairytale is still unclear. For this reason, this key function is irresolute. What this means is that the peak of the narrative is not really achieved. Even after the Struggle, it is not clear whether Beauty will return to the Beast's palace; and it is certainly not clear whether the two of them will ultimately marry.

0. The Initial Situation is a function

The Initial Situation is a function, since someone has transformed the Prince into a Beast. But the reader does not find this out until the Transfiguration, when the Prince explains what has taken place before Beauty's family lost its fortune.

1–7. Preparation

Characters: the Father, Beauty, Beauty's Two Elder Sisters

Setting: the Beautiful Home of the Merchant, the Small Country House, the Docks

The beginning of *Beauty and the Beast* is executed by the Merchant's loss of his whole fortune, apart from a small country house far from town. This is an unusual form of Absenteeism: the entire family, and not merely one member, is forced to leave their desirable home

in town for a far less desirable one in the countryside. The long opening section marks the distinction between the Two Elder Sisters and the youngest, Beauty. Beauty is the Heroine, while her two Elder Sisters are the composite Villain. As a result, articulated as exchanges between the Merchant-Father and his daughters, the first two paired functions (Request/Violation, Reconnaissance/Delivery) are executed differently for the Elder Sisters and Beauty.

Second and third functions: Request/Violation vs. Request/Acceptance

The second function of Requesting is executed when the Merchant makes a Tearful Request to his children that they must go to the small house in the countryside and work for their living. The two Elder Sisters violate this Request by their initial Refusal. They believe they have several lovers and that these lovers will be happy to receive them, in spite of their lack of wealth. The Elder Sisters are mistaken, of course, and are eventually forced to Accept Reluctantly the relocation. For her part, Beauty does receive a number of offers of marriage from several gentlemen who know of her financial situation. Beauty, however, is determined to Accept her Father's Request, since she cannot think of leaving him in his misfortune.

Box 10.1 The order of the second and third functions in *Beauty and the Beast*

	Father–Beauty	Father–Beauty's Elder Sisters
Second Function	Request	Request
Third Function	Enthusiastic Acceptance	Initial Refusal and Reluctant Acceptance

Indeed, Beauty's Enthusiastic Acceptance goes well beyond simply relocating without complaint. While the Merchant and his Three Sons work on the small farm, Beauty rises at four in order to get the house clean and the dinner ready.

Fourth and fifth functions: Delivery/Reconnaissance vs. Reconnaissance/Delivery

At this point, the Merchant receives a letter with the news that a ship has arrived in port with merchandise belonging to him, and he believes that this will prove the saving of the family. The news of this unexpected wealth causes the two Eldest Daughters to believe they will soon be able to go back to their former lives. As a result, they execute the Delivery function prematurely, by begging their father to purchase for them “new gowns, headdresses, ribbons, and all manner of trifles”. The Merchant then executes the Reconnaissance function by asking his youngest Daughter what she would like. Beauty replies: “Since you have the goodness to think of me,” answered she, “be so kind to bring me a rose, for as none grows hereabouts, they are a kind of rarity.”

Box 10.2 The order of the fourth and fifth functions in *Beauty and the Beast*

	Father–Beauty	Father–Beauty’s Elder Sisters
Fourth Function	Reconnaissance	Delivery
Fifth Function	Delivery	Reconnaissance

Sixth and seventh functions: Trickery/Complicity

Unfortunately, some businessmen haggle with the Merchant about the value of his merchandise and take him to court. This frivolous lawsuit executes the function of Trickery, and the Merchant is Complicit when he gives up the lawsuit without a fight. These men thus seize the Merchant’s possessions (rather than what might specifically belong to the Heroine). Having carried out the function of Trickery, the businessmen disappear from the fairytale.

8–10. Complication: Lack or Desire/Entrapment

Characters: the Father

Setting: the Large Forest, the Strange Palace

Becoming lost while travelling through a large forest, the Merchant spies an illuminated palace in the distance. Leaving his horse in the stable with some hay, the Merchant enters a large hall where he finds a table set for one person to dine. From the Father's point of view, the pivotal eighth function is a Lack: he seeks food and shelter for the night. But this function is really a form of Entrapment, since the Beast's Palace is enchanted.

Mediation is carried out when the Merchant says out loud: "I hope, the master of the house, or his servants will excuse the liberty I take; I suppose it will not be long before some of them appear."

At eleven, however, no one has come by. The Merchant therefore takes Counteraction by beginning to eat and afterwards going upstairs to bed to sleep for the night. Next morning, the Merchant executes Departure by leaving.

11–15. Donation

Characters: the Merchant, the Beast

Setting: the Palace, the Arbor of Roses, the Merchant's House in the Country

The Donation Sequence involves two exchanges: the first is that between the Merchant and the Beast. This exchange is initiated by the rose that the Merchant takes without asking from the Beast's arbor. The second is that between Beauty and the Merchant-Father. This exchange consists in the Beast's request that the Merchant-Father send one of his daughters to compensate him for the theft of the rose.

As the Merchant passes through the rose arbor in the Beast's garden, he recalls Beauty's request and plucks one. The Beast appears, accusing the Merchant of ungratefulness and theft, and threatens to kill him.

These words of the Beast initiate the Test, with the Merchant's reaction being to beg forgiveness, pleading that the rose was for his youngest Daughter. The Beast then makes a bargain with the Merchant:

I will forgive you, on condition that one of your daughters will come willingly, and suffer for you. Let me have no words, but go

about your business, and swear that if your daughter refuse to die in your stead, you will return within three months.

The Merchant's Reaction completes the Test sequence: the Merchant believes that he has bought time for himself to see his daughters once more. For this reason, he promises to return. At this point, the Beast rewards the Merchant with a great quantity of gold. This gift represents the execution of the 14th function, the Receipt of Goods.

The second part of the Donation sequence is initiated with the exchange between the Merchant (as intermediary for the Beast) and his daughter, Beauty. In this way, the Merchant carries out certain functions typically associated with the Heroine.

The Merchant hands the rose to Beauty, and then tells her of his adventure, which naturally includes a reprisal of the Test function. Beauty's Reaction is immediately to take the decision to accompany her Father back to the Beast's Palace.

Box 10.3 The Donation/Exchange sequence in *Beauty and the Beast*

	First Donation Sequence	Second Donation Sequence
Test	Beast makes request of Beauty's Father	Beast makes request of Beauty (through her Father)
Reaction	Merchant Agrees	Beauty Agrees
Donation	Merchant keeps the rose; Beast offers gold to the Merchant for Beauty	Beauty receives the rose from the Merchant; Beast receives Beauty from Merchant

The gold that the Merchant has brought with him is used to marry off the two Eldest Daughters, and Beauty and her Father then return together to the Beast's Palace, the 15th function of Spatial Transference.

16–18. Struggle

Characters: Beauty, the Beast
Setting: the Palace of the Beast

As has already been said, a Struggle may take place without the full knowledge of one or other of the parties. For Beauty, the Struggle looks very much like one of survival, since she fears that the Beast wishes to eat her. It is only later that she realizes that the Beast wishes to marry her, even though this still does not appear as an attractive proposition. For the Beast, the Struggle is an amorous one, since he must convince Beauty that he is a worthy marriage partner, in spite of his horrific appearance and his self-admitted lack of wit. The most important aspect of the Struggle is that the Heroine and the Hero come together spatially, even if the Heroine does not fully recognize what this means.

In the midst of the Struggle, a character may either be Branded or Ornamented. In *Beauty and the Beast*, Beauty is Ornamented. The Beast presents her with an apartment in the palace, complete with a large library, a harpsichord and several music books, while it is the Beast who is repeatedly Branded or Wounded. This function is the result of Beauty's nightly refusal of his offer of marriage.

Victory of a sort occurs with the 18th function, after Beauty spends three happy months with the Beast, growing to like, rather than fear, his company. The moment of Victory occurs when the Beast asks Beauty to promise never to leave him, and Beauty replies: "I could, indeed, promise never to leave you entirely, but I have so great a desire to see my father, that I shall fret to death, if you refuse me that satisfaction."

19. The irresolute nineteenth function

Characters: Beauty, the Beast

Setting: the Palace

Propp suggests that the pivotal 19th function represents the Peak of the Narrative. In most fairytales, this is true. For example, in *The Frog Prince*, at the moment of Victory, the pivotal 18th function, the Reluctant Princess has managed to survive for three nights in the company of the Frog, and the Frog has managed to sleep for three nights in the bed of the Princess. The pivotal 19th function represents the Disenchantment or Uncovering of the Crime, with the revelation that the Frog is really a Prince. In this way, the Reluctant Princess is rewarded for her patience. In Charles Perrault's version of *Little Red Riding Hood*, Little Red Riding Hood is eaten by the Wolf.

This represents a catastrophic defeat for the Heroine and the end of the fairytale.

Box 10.4 The doubled pivotal nineteenth function in *The Frog Prince*

<i>The Frog Prince</i>		
<i>Uncovering of the Crime Disenchantment</i>		
Nineteenth Function	The Reluctant Princess discovers the Frog's true identity	The Prince breaks the spell of the Wicked Fairy

In other fairytales, however, the peak of the narrative still requires the Return and Difficult Task sequences.

Box 10.5 Options for the pivotal nineteenth function

<i>Cinderella</i>		<i>The Robber Bridegroom</i>
<i>Liquidation of Desire</i>		<i>Uncovering of the Crime</i>
The Pivotal 19th Function	Cinderella asks in jest to borrow her sister's clothes for the ball	The Reluctant Bridegroom discovers the grisly truth about the Robber Bridegroom

By the 19th function in *Cinderella*, the reader can be in little doubt that the Prince truly loves the mysterious Princess he has danced with at the Ball. While it still remains to find a way to reveal who Cinderella really is, by the time of the Return, her Victory over her Stepsisters is complete. Similarly, in *The Robber Bridegroom*, after the Reluctant Bride and the Very, Very Old Woman have survived the night in the Godless Crew's Den, there is no doubt in their minds that the Robber Bridegroom is a murderer. While it still remains a task to discover how best to expose and punish the Godless Crew, there is no doubt that the Robber Bridegroom is an unsuitable marriage prospect.

In *Beauty and the Beast*, however, the true nature of the Beast is not uncovered at the 19th plot function; and Beauty has already indicated that, though she might like the Beast very much, she is incapable of marrying someone so ugly. It is therefore radically unclear whether or not Beauty will return to stay with the Beast once again.

Her choice to do so will become the Difficult Task, and it is only with the subsequent Transfiguration that the true nature of the Beast will be revealed. For this reason, the 19th function is best labelled as Irresolute.

Box 10.6 The doubled irresolute nineteenth function in *Beauty and the Beast*

<i>Beauty and the Beast</i>		
	<i>Permission</i>	<i>Promise</i>
The Irresolute 19th Function	Beauty receives permission from the Beast to return home to visit her Father	The Beast receives a promise from Beauty to return to the palace after her visit home

20–22. Return

Characters: Beauty, the Beast, Beauty’s Elder Sisters, Beauty’s Father
 Setting: the Home of Beauty’s Father

Beauty’s Return to her Father’s home occurs by magic, with her being instantaneously transported from the Beast’s Palace. This mode of execution naturally precludes the execution of a Pursuit–Escape sequence. The loud shriek of the Maid at the home of Beauty’s Father executes Anonymous Arrival.

Interestingly, there would appear to be a further execution of the Ornamentation function, since the Maid informs Beauty that there is a large chest of “gowns, covered with gold and diamonds”, a gift from the Beast for staying in close contact with him for three months.

Beauty tries to present some of these clothes to her Sisters, but the trunk disappears and only returns with the gowns intact when she gives up on her effort to reward her Elder Sisters. For their part,

her Elder Sisters are jealous of Beauty's princess-like appearance, and because they themselves have made bad marriages, they try to convince her to stay longer than the one week she has promised the Beast. Their efforts to keep Beauty with them represent Unfounded Claims, since they do not truly love her. Indeed, one of the Sisters actually suggests to "endeavor to detain her above a week, and perhaps the silly monster will be so enraged at her for breaking her word, that he will devour her." Nonetheless, their deceptive efforts pay off, for Beauty agrees to stay with them an extra week.

23–31. Difficult Task

Characters: Beauty, the Beast, Beauty's Two Elder Sisters

Setting: the Home of the Father, the Palace of the Beast, the Palace Garden

Beauty now begins to recognize that she is likely to cause the Beast "whom she sincerely loved" some uneasiness and begins to want to see him again. The dream that she has contains a Receipt of Information, which makes her want to return to the Beast's Palace. In the dream, she is "in the palace garden, and that she saw Beast extended on the grass plat, who seemed just expiring, and, in a dying voice, reproached her with her ingratitude". She wrestles with her conscience:

"Am I not very wicked," said she, "to act so unkindly to Beast, that has studied so much, to please me in everything? Is it his fault if he is so ugly, and has so little sense? He is kind and good, and that is sufficient. Why did I refuse to marry him? I should be happier with the monster than my sisters are with their husbands; it is neither wit, nor a fine person, in a husband, that makes a woman happy, but virtue, sweetness of temper, and complaisance, and Beast has all these valuable qualifications. It is true, I do not feel the tenderness of affection for him, but I find I have the highest gratitude, esteem, and friendship; I will not make him miserable, were I to be so ungrateful I should never forgive myself."

She places her ring on the table and after falling asleep, she wakes to find herself back in the Beast's Palace. Having put on one of her best dresses, Beauty waits until evening for the Beast to return, but he

fails to do so. In her anxiety, she runs madly about the Palace, before recalling her dream and running as quickly as she can to the canal in the garden. Beast is lying there, senseless. Beauty fetches some water and pours it on his head to awaken him. His eyes open, and he tells her that at least he has had the satisfaction of seeing her once more, before he dies. Beauty replies:

No, dear Beast, you must not die. Live to be my husband; from this moment I give you my hand, and swear to be none but yours. Alas! I thought I had only a friendship for you, but the grief I now feel convinces me, that I cannot live without you.

If her search for the Beast executes the Difficult Task, these words execute its Solution.

The Transfiguration or Disenchantment function follows, as the Palace sparkles with light, fireworks and music. The Recognition is somewhat complex, since she turns to see her dear Beast, but he has become “one of the loveliest princes that eye ever beheld”. The Beast then tells her of his Enchantment by a Wicked Fairy:

A wicked fairy had condemned me to remain under that shape until a beautiful virgin should consent to marry me. The fairy likewise enjoined me to conceal my understanding. There was only you in the world generous enough to be won by the goodness of my temper, and in offering you my crown I can’t discharge the obligations I have to you.

But since the Enchantment has been the work of a Wicked Fairy, this is not really an Exposure and she is not Punished.

Beauty walks hand-in-hand into the Palace, where she is overjoyed to find her whole family in attendance, “whom the beautiful lady, that appeared to her in her dream, had conveyed thither”. The Lady-from-the-Dream then says:

“Beauty,” said this lady, “come and receive the reward of your judicious choice; you have preferred virtue before either wit or beauty, and deserve to find a person in whom all these qualifications are united. You are going to be a great queen. I hope the throne will not lessen your virtue, or make you forget yourself.”

The Lady-from-the-Dream then executes the Exposure and Punishment functions by saying to the two Elder Sisters:

As to you, ladies, I know your hearts, and all the malice they contain. Become two statues, but, under this transformation, still retain your reason. You shall stand before your sister's palace gate, and be it your punishment to behold her happiness; and it will not be in your power to return to your former state, until you own your faults, but I am very much afraid that you will always remain statues. Pride, anger, gluttony, and idleness are sometimes conquered, but the conversion of a malicious and envious mind is a kind of miracle.

The Marriage function is then executed, with the Prince and Beauty living together for many years “and their happiness—as it was founded on virtue—was complete”.

Box 10.7 The 31-function plot genotype of *Beauty and the Beast*

0. The Initial Situation is a Function: the Prince has been turned into a Beast by a Wicked Fairy

Preparation = Functions 1–7

1. Absenteeism: the Merchant loses his entire fortune, with the whole family having to move to a small house in the countryside
2. Request: the Merchant requests his daughters to endure the new set of humble surroundings
3. Violation: the Elder Sisters are unhappy about this, but Beauty is content
4. Reconnaissance: the Merchant asks his daughters what they would like him to bring for them when he returns from his trip
5. Delivery: the Elder Sisters request expensive gifts, while Beauty requests a rose
6. Trickery: the Merchant is tricked and does not receive due compensations for his goods
7. Submission: the Merchant reluctantly heads for home

Complication = Functions 8–10

8. Entrapment: the Merchant loses his way in the snow-covered forest
9. Mediation: the Merchant hopes out loud that the Master of the Palace will not take offence at his actions
10. Counteraction: the Merchant eats and drinks and later goes to sleep in one of the bedrooms
11. Departure: the Merchant leaves the Palace

Donation = Functions 12–15

Donation 1

12. Donor Function: the Merchant spies an arbor of roses in the Beast's garden
13. The Hero's Reaction: the Merchant plucks a rose for Beauty
14. Receipt of Important Information and Goods: the Beast appears, requesting the Merchant to send one of his daughters to him—or to return himself in three months to face death; the Merchant is rewarded with a rich supply of goods as he leaves the Beast's Palace.
15. Spatial Transference: the Merchant returns to his house in the countryside

Donation 2

12. Donor Function: the Merchant tells his daughters about the contract with the Beast
13. The Hero's Reaction: Beauty volunteers to return to the Beast's Palace
14. Receipt of Important Information: Beauty is told about the Beast's contract with her Father; the two Eldest Daughters are married off with the money provided by the Beast
15. Spatial Transference: Beauty goes to the Palace of the Beast

Struggle

16. Struggle: living together at the place, Beauty must grow to love the Beast

17. Branding: the Beast asks Beauty if she will marry him. Despite her fear, Beauty answers that she does not, wounding the Beast
18. Victory: Beauty asks for permission to leave the Beast for a week to visit her sick Father, demonstrating her great love for both

The Peak of the Narrative = Function 19

19. End-of-Entrapment: the Beast grants Beauty permission to leave the Palace

Return = Functions 20–22

20. Return: Beauty returns to her home to visit her sick Father
21. Pursuit
22. Rescue

There is no Pursuit or Rescue function in this fairytale

Recognition = Functions 23–31

23. Unrecognized Arrival: Beauty arrives at the home of her Father
24. Unfounded Claims: unhappy in their own marriages, the two Elder Sisters try to delay Beauty's return to the Palace of the Beast
25. Difficult Task: Beauty is torn between the claims of her own family and her love for the Beast
26. Solution: Beauty dreams that she sees the Beast lying in a field dying

Difficult Task = Functions 23–31

20. Return: Beauty decides to return to the Palace of the Beast
23. Unrecognized Arrival: Beauty arrives at the Palace
25. Difficult Task: Beauty cannot find the Beast anywhere
26. Solution: finding the Beast near death, Beauty asks him to be her husband
27. Recognition: Beauty sees the true form of her husband
28. Exposure: the evil deed of the Wicked Fairy is exposed; the evil of the two Elder Sisters is exposed

29. Transfiguration: the Beast regains his Princely form
30. Punishment: the Two Eldest Sisters are punished by having to contemplate Beauty's happiness
31. Marriage: Beauty and the Prince are married

Box 10.8 The cast of characters in *Beauty and the Beast*

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|--------------------------|--|
| 1. The Wicked Fairy | The Wicked Fairy, who casts a spell, turning the Prince into a Beast |
| 2. The Reluctant Heroine | Beauty, who goes on a journey, reacts to the Beast (through her Merchant-Father) and weds at the end |
| 3. The Villain | Beauty's Two Elder Sisters, who struggle with Beauty |
| 4. The Good Dispatcher | The Beast, who dispatches the Merchant-Father (and afterwards Beauty) |
| 5. The Gift Donor | The Beast, who tests the Merchant-Father (and afterwards Beauty) |
| 6. The Purposeful Helper | Beauty, who transfigures the Beast |
| 7. The False Heroines | The Elder Sisters |
| 8. The Prince | The Beast-Prince |